

SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING AGENDA
BOARD OF EDUCATION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021 – 7pm

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The Richmond Board of Education acknowledges and thanks the First Peoples of the hən̓q̓əmi̓nəḥ (hun-ki-meen-um) language group on whose traditional and unceded territories we teach, learn and live.

1. Adoption of Agenda

2. Transitional Learning Program

Report from the Superintendent of Schools attached.

RECOMMENDATION.

3. Adjournment

Report to the Board of Education (Richmond) Public

DATE: March 5, 2021
FROM: Scott Robinson, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: Transitional Learning Program

Recommendation:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Richmond Board of Education extend the Elementary Transitional Learning Program in its current instructional format until June 29, 2021 (end of 2020-2021 school year) for all elementary schools in the district with the exception of Spul'u'kwuks Elementary and Garden City Elementary;

IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED THAT the Richmond Board of Education extend the Elementary Transitional Learning Program in its current instructional format at Spul'u'kwuks Elementary School until July 27, 2021 (end of 2020-2021 school year) and at Garden City Elementary until July 13, 2021 (end of 2020-2021 school year); and

IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED THAT the Richmond Board of Education extend the Secondary Transitional Learning Program in its current instructional format until June 28, 2021 (end of 2020-2021 school year).

Introduction:

The elementary (K-7) Transitional Learning (TL) program is currently scheduled to end on March 12, 2021 and the secondary (grades 8/9) TL program is currently scheduled to end on April 23, 2021. The purpose of this report is to provide background information and a status update on the TL programs, and to provide a staff recommendation for the Board's consideration.

Background:

At the end of August 2020, a large number of parents of students in kindergarten through grade nine requested that the district create a transitional learning (TL) program that would allow them to have their child learn remotely from home on a temporary basis but would also allow them to retain their spot in their current school placement. The Board subsequently made the decision to offer an elementary TL program for students in kindergarten through grade seven and a secondary TL program for students in grades eight and nine.

When TL programs were approved by the Ministry, it was made clear that they were intended to be temporary and transitional in nature with the full intention of having all students return to in-person learning. Staffing was therefore assigned to elementary schools which enabled schools to 'hold spots' for transitional program learners until they returned to in-person learning. The intent was that students would return to school to fill the classroom spots that had been allocated to them in September. As the school year has progressed, however, a relatively large number of parents have continued to express concern about having their children return to school and have not chosen to have their child return to in-person learning.

During the school year, some of these parents have requested extensions to the program. Based on these requests, the Board of Education made the decision to extend the program from the middle of December until Spring Break for elementary and until the end of the third quarter for secondary. At the time of that decision, it was made clear to parents that the elementary program would likely conclude prior to spring

break and the secondary program would likely conclude on April 23, 2021. This decision was made with the hope that public health conditions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic would either improve or at least remain somewhat stable prior to the end of January 2021. Since that Board decision, parents have continued to advocate for a further program extension to the end of the school year.

Current COVID-19 Public Health Local Context:

As of the date of this report, there have been approximately 95 documented cases of possible exposure to COVID-19 in schools in the Richmond School District since the beginning of the school year. Based on the information provided by Vancouver Coastal Health, all of these cases originated in the community, not in schools. There has been no documented transmission of the virus within schools in our district with over 17,000 students attending school in-person every day for over six months. The Provincial Health Officer and other public health experts have stated on multiple occasions that they believe based on scientific evidence that schools are safe places to be. The school district has had a significant focus on health and safety since the beginning of the pandemic and continues to meet or exceed all requirements for K-12 schools.

Current Elementary Transitional Learning Program:

Instructional Model:

Students in the program continue to be taught by a combination of school-based classroom and non-enrolling teachers as well as educators from the Learning Services department. Instruction is offered through a combination of small and larger group online classes, district-based Zoom webinars and small group Zoom check-ins with school-based teachers. After the winter break, school-based teacher check-ins were reduced from twice daily to a minimum of twice weekly. This program format is similar to that being offered in other metro Vancouver school district TL programs.

Program Enrolment:

Approximately 4000 students were initially enrolled in the elementary program. Currently, there are approximately **2200** students still enrolled in K-7 Transitional learning which accounts for approximately **19%** of elementary learners in the district. The percentage of TL learners per school ranges from approximately 5% to 33% of the total school population.

Program Staffing:

A total of **20 FTE** additional teaching staff is currently deployed to support the elementary TL program (in addition to school-based and district Learning Services staff). The district allocated 15.0 FTE teacher staffing from September through to spring break (March 12, 2021) and an additional 5.0 FTE was added starting February 1st to replace 5.0 FTE equivalent learning services staff who have returned to their regular district roles.

Challenges Associated with Current Program:

Similar challenges outlined in the December 16th public report to the Board on this topic continue to exist:

- There continue to be significant concerns regarding student mental health associated with some students who have been away from school since March 2020.
- A large proportion of students in the elementary TL program are eligible to receive ELL support. Despite significant efforts to provide this service, it is more challenging to provide ELL support in a remote environment than in a face-to-face instructional context.
- Workload for some teachers continues to be an issue.

- Some teachers continue to report that being responsible for both in-person and transitional support has continued to negatively impact the level of support available to students in the in-person program.
- A relatively small number of TL students and parents continue to be disengaged from the program
- The deployment of 20.0 FTE additional teachers has had an impact on the already limited pool of temporary teachers on call, adding to the existing challenges of filling teacher absences across the district.
- The 20.0 FTE additional teachers would mean a reallocation of **\$600,000** of the remaining return to school funds.
- 13.0 FTE continues to be deployed from the district Learning Services department resulting in those staff not being available to provide their usual support across the district.

Proposed Elementary Transitional Program:

Recommendations:

1. *It is recommended that the current instructional model for elementary transitional learning be continued until the end of the 2020-2021 school year for all elementary schools.*
2. *It is recommended that the current level of additional staffing (20.0 FTE) be maintained until the end of the 2020-2021 school year. The cost associated with this staffing is approximately **\$600,000**. These costs can be covered by reallocating, eliminating or reducing existing expenditures in the remaining federal return-to-school funds.*
3. *Continue to deploy 13.0 FTE Learning Services staff to support transitional learning.*

Additional Considerations:

- If the elementary program is not extended after spring break, a temporary extension of the program until Friday, April 9th will be required in order to allow schools and families time to make appropriate arrangements.

Current Secondary Transitional Learning Program:

Instructional Model:

For the first two quarters of this school year, students in grades 8 and 9 were provided with the opportunity to take the four main 'core' courses for their grade level: *Mathematics, English Language Arts, Social Studies and Science*. During the third quarter, the majority of students have been offered the opportunity to take French as well as an elective. Students have continued to be taught remotely by a group of Richmond Virtual Schools teachers who are responsible exclusively for learners in the transitional learning program.

Program Enrolment:

Approximately 400 students were initially enrolled in the secondary (grade 8/9) program and there are currently approximately **300** students still enrolled which accounts for approximately **3.5%** of secondary students in the district. The percentage of TL learners per school ranges from approximately 1% to 6% of the total school population.

Program Staffing:

Currently, 12.0 classroom teacher FTE has been allocated to support the secondary program and an additional 1.0 FTE has been allocated for counselling and non-enrolling teacher support. 1.0 FTE clerical time has also been allocated in order to deal with program registration and communication. Staffing has been funded completely through the federal return to school allocation through to the end of third quarter.

Challenges Associated with Current Program:

Similar challenges outlined in the December 16th public report to the Board on this topic continue to exist:

- Students continue to miss out on the social aspects of being at school with peers and staff
- There are reduced opportunities in terms of the number of elective courses available.
- The 12.0 FTE required additional teachers would mean a reallocation of **\$300,000** of the remaining return to school funds.

Proposed Secondary Transitional Program:

Recommendations:

- *It is recommended that the current instructional model for secondary transitional learning be continued until the end of the 2020-2021 school year.*
- *It is recommended that 12.0 FTE of teacher staffing be allocated until the end of the 2020-2021 school year. The cost associated with this staffing is approximately **\$300,000**. These costs can be covered by reallocating, eliminating or reducing existing expenditures in the remaining federal return-to-school funds.*

Conclusion:

All schools in the Richmond School District are meeting or exceeding current public health and safety guidelines for K-12 schools. As of the date of this report, no documented transmissions of the COVID-19 virus have occurred in schools despite multiple incidents of exposures originating outside of schools. Public health experts have stated on multiple occasions that schools are safe places for students and staff. Some parents, however, do not believe that it is safe to send their children to school and are clear that they would like to see an extension of the transitional learning program.

It is the strong belief of staff that the vast majority of students are most effectively supported by attending school in-person, and the goal of the district since September 2020 has been to encourage and support all families to have their child return to in-person learning. When school resumes after the summer break in September 2021, a large number of students will have been out of school for almost 18 months should the TL program be extended until the end of the current school year. If the TL program is extended, parents of students in the program will be encouraged and supported to make arrangements with their child's school principal to begin a return to in-person learning before the end of the current school year so students have the opportunity to begin the critical process of reintegrating into their school before classes resume in September.

In making a decision regarding the possible further extension of the program the Board may wish to consider the impact of extending the transitional program on the school district and its employees, on the students currently attending in-person learning, and those in the transitional learning program. The goal should continue to be to have all students attending school in-person as soon as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Robinson
Superintendent of Schools